

## Primary Source Reading 8



### How Thomas Jefferson Became Author of the Declaration of Independence

**About the Source** In 1822 John Adams wrote a letter to one of Thomas Jefferson's greatest enemies, Timothy Pickering, who thought Jefferson was too young to have been allowed to write the Declaration of Independence.

**Interpreting the Source** Adams wrote this letter almost 50 years after the Declaration of Independence was written. As you read the letter, consider how time may have affected Adams's memory of events.

#### LETTER FROM JOHN ADAMS TO TIMOTHY PICKERING AUGUST 6, 1822

You inquire why so young a man as Mr. Jefferson was placed at the head of the committee for preparing a Declaration of Independence? I answer: . . . to place Virginia at the head of everything. . . . Mr. Jefferson came into Congress in June, 1775, and brought with him a reputation for literature, science, and a happy talent of composition. Writings of his were handed about, remarkable for the peculiar felicity [pleasing manner] of expression. Though a silent member in Congress, he was so prompt, frank, explicit [direct] and decisive upon committees and in conversation . . . that he soon seized upon my heart; and upon this occasion I gave him my vote, and did all in my power to procure [obtain] the votes of others. I think he had one more vote than any other, and that placed him at the head of the committee. I had the next highest number, and that placed me the second. The committee met, discussed the subject, and then appointed Mr. Jefferson and me to make the draught [draft], I suppose because we were the two first on the list.

The sub-committee met. Jefferson proposed to me to make the draught.

I said, "I will not."

"You should do it."

"Oh! no."

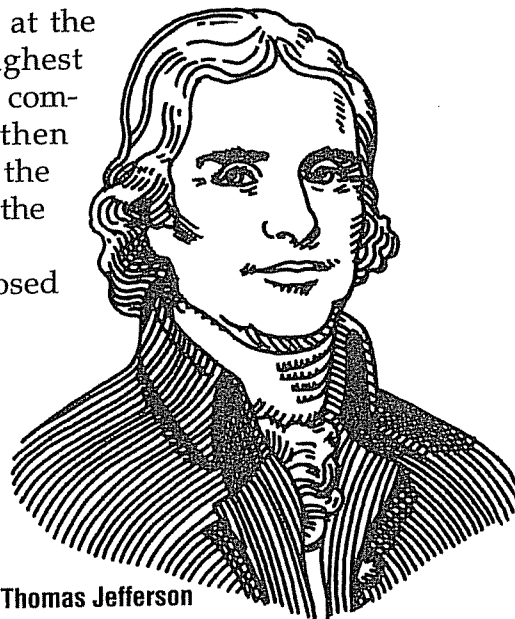
"Why will you not? You ought to do it."

"I will not."

"Why?"

"Reason enough."

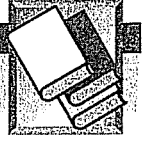
"What can be your reasons?"



Thomas Jefferson

(continued)

## Primary Source Reading 8 (continued)



"Reason first—You are a Virginian, and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason second—I am obnoxious, suspected and unpopular. You are very much otherwise. Reason third—You can write ten times better than I can."

"Well," said Jefferson, "if you are decided, I will do as well as I can."

"Very well. When you have drawn it up, we will have a meeting."

A meeting we accordingly had, and conned [studied closely] the paper over. I was delighted with its high tone and the flights of oratory with which it abounded. . . . There were . . . expressions which I would not have inserted, if I had drawn it up, particularly that which called the King tyrant. I thought this too personal; for I never believed George to be a tyrant in disposition [personality] and in nature; I always believed him to be deceived by his courtiers [people in his court] on both sides of the Atlantic, and, in his official capacity only, cruel.

(Source: "To Timothy Pickering," In *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants*, ed. Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris. New York: Harper and Row, 1958.)

**DIRECTIONS: Recalling Facts** Answer the following questions.

1. According to Adams, who was chosen by the committee to prepare a draft of the Declaration? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What reasons did Adams give for why Jefferson should write the draft instead of him? \_\_\_\_\_

### CRITICAL THINKING

3. Why do you think people thought that a Virginian should be in charge of the writing of the Declaration? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why might many Patriots find Adams's comments about King George surprising? \_\_\_\_\_

### READER RESPONSE

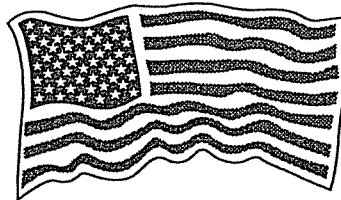
5. Think about what you already know about the people and events involved in the writing of the Declaration of Independence. What impression does this letter give you of Jefferson? Of Adams? \_\_\_\_\_

## The American Revolution

**Knowledge:** Identify the following: Prime Minister Grenville, Paul Revere, Crispus Attucks, the Stamp Act, the Navigation Acts, and the Proclamation of 1763.



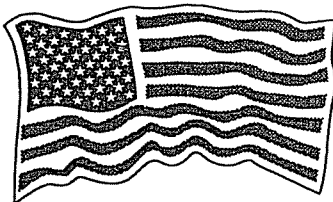
**Comprehension:**  
Explain the slogan  
No Taxation without  
Representation.



**Application:** Prepare a colorful map of the Saratoga Campaign. Be sure to include a title and a legend.



**Analysis:** Point out three cultural differences between Britain and America that significantly affected the war.



**Synthesis:** Suppose that Parliament had repealed the Tea Tax and the Intolerable Acts and that war had not broken out. How would life be different if there had been no American Revolution?



**Evaluation:** Defend the idea that the Battle of Saratoga was the turning point of the war.

